

RECENT TRENDS IN THE FISHERY

Some of the more important trends in the northern shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Maine pertain to the fleet and to the shrimp catch. In regard to the fleet, the trend is toward larger vessels, especially designed and equipped for shrimping. Shrimp vessels capable of operating farther offshore and during the warmer seasons of the year are becoming particularly more numerous in the fleet operating out of Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Total landings, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 3, are leveling out at roughly 24 million pounds per year. Correspondingly, the value of shrimp landings is

also leveling out, at \$4.5 million annually. Less well documented are decreases in catch per unit effort and an equally discouraging decrease in the size of shrimp landed.

Although the bulk of each year's landings is caught during the later winter and early spring, there is a trend of increased fishing during the warm seasons of the year (Table 4).

Assuming the future demand for shrimp remains high, it can be anticipated that small shrimp will make up a larger proportion of the catch.

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Gulf Estuaries Studied

The great shrimp nursery grounds in the estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico are being described in unprecedented detail in a series of publications issued at the recommendation of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. The most recent such publication to appear is "Cooperative Gulf of Mexico Estuarine Inventory and Study, Florida: Phase I, Area Description," by J. Kneeland McNulty, William N. Lindall, Jr., and James E. Sykes. All, at the time the report was prepared, were members of the NMFS Gulf Coastal Fisheries Center Biological Laboratory, St. Petersburg Beach, Fla.

The object of the study was to develop realistic comparable appraisals of estuarine resources along the entire coast. "The planners envisioned a broad study that would include physical descriptions of the estuarine basins and waters within them plus comprehensive

biological studies of plant and animal life. Funding was provided through the Commercial Fisheries Research and Development Act (Public Law 88-309, as amended) with which studies in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana were financed in part." The St. Petersburg Laboratory and the Gulf Coastal Fisheries Center, Galveston, Tex., took on the preparation of the parts of the study dealing with the west coast of Florida and the Texas coast.

Published as NOAA Technical Report NMFS CIRC-368, the Florida study deals with the vegetation of the coast, its geology, stream discharge, water temperature, salinity, oysters and clams, and artificial fishing reefs. Figures and charts trace the rise in population in the area during the past decades, its economic development, and the amounts of pollution and dredging.

Florida's Gulf coast estuaries cover

just over 3 million acres: half unvegetated, and half occupied by mangroves, tidal marshes and submerged vegetation. These estuaries are drowned river valleys, resulting from melting polar ice caps during the current interglacial stage.

The hydrology of the estuaries is discussed from three aspects: stream discharge, water temperature and salinity. The impact of these on commercially important oysters and clams is discussed also.

The economic development of Florida's Gulf coast has resulted in increased human population near its estuaries along with its attendant problems: artificial fishing reefs, pollution and dredging. Although dredging has come under legislative control, pollution legislation has been only partially effective and much remains to be done in this area to preserve the estuarine environment.

The report carries extensive figures and tables. The entire coast is covered by a series of detailed maps (see Figure 1).

NOAA Technical Report NMFS CIRC-368, which consists of 126 pages, is available from the Superintendent of

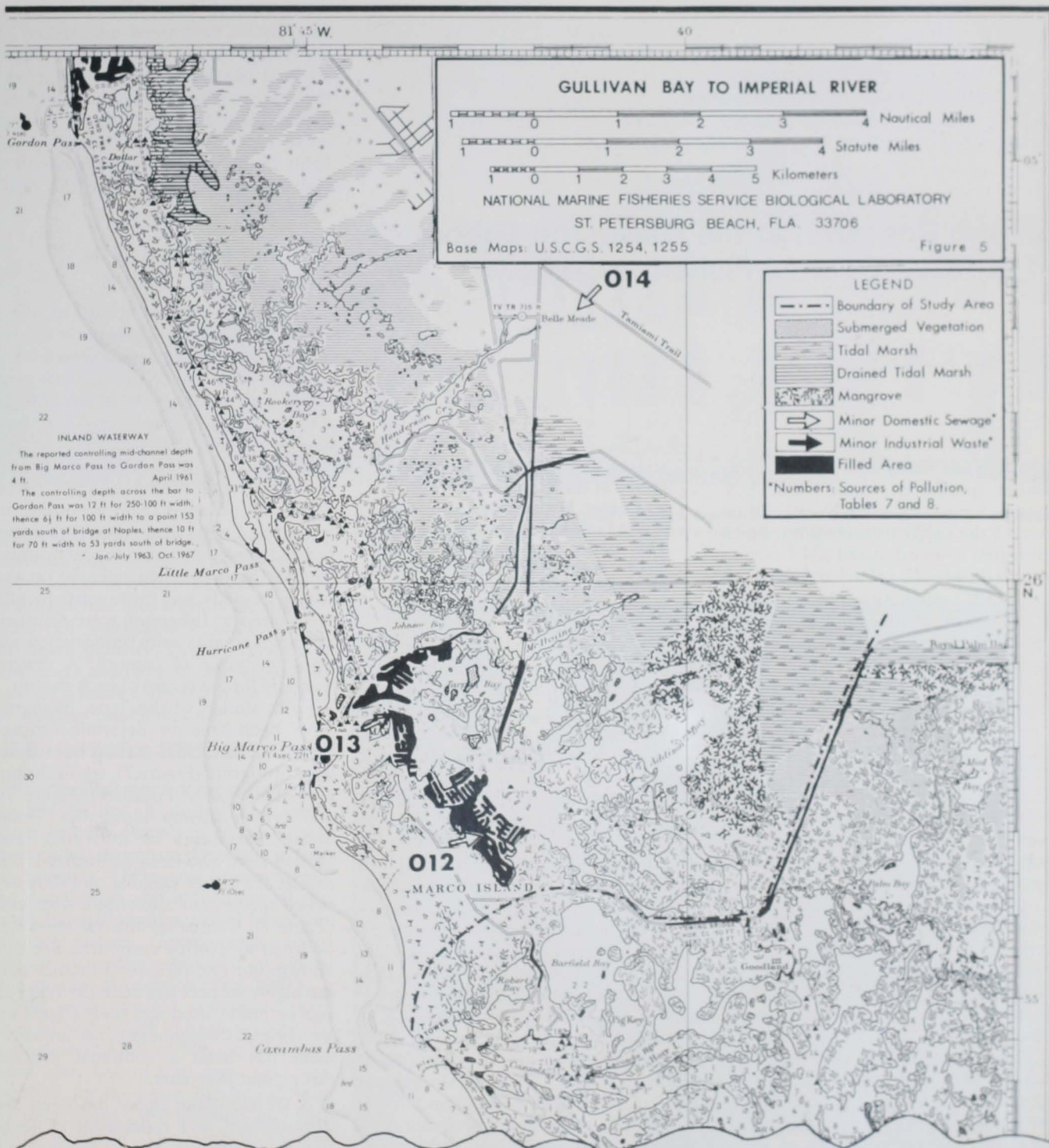


Figure 1.—Section of map showing section of Florida west coast from Gullivan Bay to Imperial River.

Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The price is \$1.25.

Of the other studies, that for Alabama

was published by the Alabama Conservation Department. The Louisiana study was published by the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission.

The Mississippi and Texas reports are still in preparation. Another volume of the Florida study is also being prepared.